DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 414 IR 008 997

AUTHOR Meringoff, Laurene K.
TITLE The Influence of the Medium on Children's Story Apprehension.
PUB DATE 10 Apr 80
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 10, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Children: Comparative Analysis: Elementary Education: Intermode Differences: Listening Comprehension: Media Research: *Media Selection: Motion: *Picture Books: *Recall (Psychology): *Story Telling: *Television: Visualization

ABSTRACT

This study compared childrens' apprehension of an unfamiliar story either read to them from an illustrated book or presented as a comparable televised film. Subjects were 48 children, 24 of them six to seven years old, and 24 nine to ten years old, who were randomly assigned to one medium condition and individually presented the story. Response measures examined recall of story content as well as inferences about characters and events. Children exposed to the televised story remembered more story actions, used physical gestures more often to illustrate their verbal retelling, and relied more on visual content as the basis for inferences. In comparison, children who were read the story in picture book form recalled more story vocabulary, based their inferences more on textual content, general knowledge and personal experience, and made more use of the storytelling situation as an opportunity to ask questions and make comments. (Author/CHC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED196414

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIUM ON CHILDREN'S STORY APPREHENSION

by

Laurene K. Meringoff

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Laurene K. Meringoff

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IR008997

OCT 2 2 RECD

ABSTRACT: The influence of the medium on children's story apprehension.

Laurene K. Meringoff

Media differ with respect to the kinds of information they are best suited to convey. This paper summarizes initial research conducted to explore this claim.

This study compared children's apprehension of an unfamiliar story either read to them from an illustrated book or presented as a comparable televised film. There were 48 children, 24 of whom were younger (6-7 years old) and 24 of whom were older (9-10 years old), who were randomly assigned to one medium condition and individually presented the story. Response measures examined recall of story content as well as inferences about characters and events. Children exposed to the televised story remembered more story actions, used physical gestures more often to illustrate their verbal retelling, and relied more on visual content as the basis for inferences. In comparison, children who were read the story in picture book form recalled more story vocabulary, based their inferences more on textual content, general knowledge and personal experience, and made more use of the storytelling situation as an opportunity to ask questions and make comments. To the extent that children have repeated experience with specific media, such differential medium effects on apprehension suggest important implications for children's cognitive development.

AERA Presentation
10 April 1980
Boston

The influence of the medium on children's story apprehension
Laurene K. Meringoff

Media -- and the symbol systems they use to represent content -- differ with respect to the kinds of information they are best suited to convey. To reveal or tap these differences, media must be defined and studied in terms of attributes which distinguish them from one another and which can also be related to responses measurable in children.

To explore this claim, let us use stories as content and, for media, picture book and television. Allow me to summarize initial research I conducted (and subsequently helped to replicate) comparing children's apprehension of an unfamiliar story either read to them from an illustrated storybook or presented as a comparable televised film.

The most general question I was engaged with, and still am, is: does the medium in which a story is communicated to children influence their apprehension of it? Are different kinds of story information conveyed more effectively to children by a picture book or by television?

Hypotheses about such differences follow from analysis of the material features of these media. Further, by comparing one medium's rendering of a story against the other, certain of the properties of each become more clearly articulated.

And, methodologically, one medium condition serves as the control for the other. Once differences are identified between media as sources of story content, one can begin to predict how such differences might be reflected in children's responses.

For example... illustrated storybooks and television are both media equipped to deliver narrative content via the symbol systems of verbal language and visual images ordered over time.

However, one evident difference between the way these media treat visual imagery is their relative ability to depict movement. Book illustrations can suggest or imply movement by such means as the position in which characters or objects are placed within a single picture, or by changes indicated in that positioning from one picture to the next. Nevertheless, each image remains discrete and static. In contrast, the illusion of movement is inherent in the display of television images. (Note that this difference between static and moving imagery also identifies a contrast between related yet distinct symbol systems)

The direct consequence of this difference is that film animates a story's images and renders a more highly illustrated version of the text than its book counterpart. However, the extent of a film's illustration tends to vary with the nature of story content. Some narrative elements lend themselves more readily than others to both visualization and movement. For instance, a story's actions are particularly accessible to direct illustration, that is, what characters do -- their movements,

gestures, facial expression, the changing physical spatial relationships among characters and objects. In contrast, dialog between characters is often accompanied by displaying the speakers rather than the content of their conversation.

I hypothesized that television's ability to depict story actions dynamically and to visually reinforce the corresponding text would tend to make more salient the visible and behavioral features of story characters. On the other hand, the book's provision of more limited and static pictorial information may allow for greater auditory attention to the text, in particular, figurative language that usually eludes visual illustration.

A number of possible outcomes were predicted and examined for each medium. Let me describe the study.

48 children participated, 24 younger 6-7 year olds, and 24 older 9-10 year olds. They were randomly assigned to one medium condition of the other, and individually presented the story.

An unfamiliar folktale was used, conveniently entitled A Story A Story, which already existed in both formats. In picture book form the story is spaced over 32 pages illustrated with 17 woodcuts. The televised format consists of an animated film adopting the same graphic style as the book. So, in terms of comparability, the story was visualized with similar images in both media; what varied was the amount of visual information, its dynamic quality, and the resulting degree of visual-temporal

continuity and visual-textual correspondence.

A new soundtrack was prepared for the film using the experimenter's voice so that the voice-over narration of the verbal text would be the same in the two formats.

To determine what children remembered of the story, their verbal recall of the story was examined on both a spontaneous and an aided basis. To tap learning beyond the explicit story content, diverse story relevant inferences were sampled: children were asked to draw inferences about physical features of characters, like strength, about a character's feelings, and about dimensions of story events, such as the difficulty of performing them, how much time they take, and the distance traveled to carry them out. Two types of information were solicited from children: the specific inference drawn (was it a hard job or an easy job to tie the leopard up in the tree?), and the evidence used to substantiate each inference (how do you know?).

For example, children could base their inferences on within story content provided either visually (it was a hard job because it looked like he was struggling) or by the text (easy, the leopard would let him cause he said they were playing a game). Alternatively, they could draw upon outside-story information, for example, by making a further inference (it was easy, Ananse the man who caught him was smart), by drawing on personal experience, or by applying general beliefs or knowledge about the world (it was hard, because leopards are heavy).

Two story-related behaviors generated spontaneously by children during the session were also monitored: physical gesturing, that is, any clearly visible body movements used to illustrate the verbal recounting of the story, and conversation initiated by children during the story presentation.

The findings of this research offer evidence of significant differences in children's responses to comparable story material presented in two different media. A different learning profile emerges for each.

Children exposed to the televised story remembered more story actions, used physical gestures more often to illustrate their verbal story retelling, offered estimates of shorter elapsed time and distance traveled for carrying out a repeated story event, and relied more on visual content as the basis for inferences.

In comparison, children who were read the story in picture book form recalled more story vocabulary, based their inferences more on textual content or outside-story information, and made more use of the story-telling situation as an opportunity to ask questions and make comments about the story.

The media differences observed provide support for the hypothesis that material differences in these media -- in particular, differences in their relative visualization of a story -- influence what content is conveyed more effectively to children.

And this initial study has been replicated (by Hope Kelly and myself) using different story materials with pre-school and school-age children, and the same pattern of medium differences is appearing.

If it is the case that a given medium brings specific story content to the foreground of children's attention (that content emphasized being a function of its own material properties), then children repeatedly exposed to this medium may accumulate experience with some kinds of information more than others. They may attend to it, recognize it, remember it, interpret it, use it in problem solving, perhaps even prefer it to other information. (Moreover, according to Salomon, they may be cultivating the particular cognitive skills required to extract this information from the symbol systems in which it is represented.)

One possible consequence is that children raised on film and television stories may develop a strong visual memory for and sensitivity to stories, whereas story experience with less visual media like illustrated books, and (even more so) with strictly auditory media like radio, may foster greater listening skills and may call for the application of more self-generated knowledge and imagery in interpreting their meaning.

It is the role of visual imagery (its presence or its absence) in children's understanding and appreciation of stories that I and my colleagues are busy exploring now.

Thank you.